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# Bang! Bang! You're Out!

*Washington and Moscow fight a war of diplomatic attrition*

Instead of missiles, dirty dishes were involved in the latest escalation of superpower tensions; in place of nuclear warheads, maids and chauffeurs were targets of a zero option. But last week's rapid-fire sequence of diplomatic expulsions from both the U.S. and the Soviet Union, culminating in Soviet withdrawal of all service workers who labored for American diplomats in Moscow and Leningrad, was more than just a game of squeeze-the-embassy—even though it did conjure up slapstick picture of striped-pants diplomats mopping floors. For one thing, the U.S. moves involved the deadly serious subject of Soviet espionage. Also, the events indicate that in the wake of the Daniloff affair and the Reykjavík summit, the superpowers are still trying to follow a kind of two-track policy: keeping alive negotiations for drastic reductions in nuclear arms while pounding each other lustily over secondary issues.

By week's end the latest round of pummeling concluded when the U.S. in effect called a truce in the war of diplomatic attrition and announced it wanted to concentrate again on arms talks. At that point, the box score showed 80 Soviet diplomats booted out of the Soviet mission to the United Nations, the embassy in Washington and the consulate in San Francisco, vs. only ten Americans kicked out of the U.S. embassy in Moscow and the consulate in Leningrad. But the U.S. was far behind in its ability to keep functioning at its outposts in the Soviet Union.

The escalation began Sunday, Oct. 19, when Moscow ordered five Americans at the U.S. embassy and consulate to get out by Nov. 1. The Kremlin was retaliating for the just completed U.S. expulsion of 25 Soviets from the U.N. mission in New York City. It was also a move the Reagan Administration had explicitly warned the Kremlin against. The staffing level at U.N. missions, said the U.S., was a separate issue from embassy and consulate staffing. If Moscow mixed the two, the U.S. would invoke a principle already written into law by Congress: the number of Soviets with diplomatic credentials in the U.S. ought to be made equal to the number of Americans accredited to the U.S.S.R.

On Monday Ronald Reagan met with his closest security advisers in the White House to plan the U.S. response. The session turned into a confrontation between Attorney General Edwin Meese and Secretary of State George Shultz. Meese, supported by CIA Director William Casey, argued that it was time to put up or shut up: the number of diplomats ought to be balanced immediately (Congress had set a three-year deadline) by kicking out Soviets rather than by sending more Americans to the Soviet Union. Meese contended that the U.S. should publicly identify the Soviet diplomats suspected of spying and expel them to achieve "parity." The names came from a list that had been drawn up by the FBI, apparently in response to a pledge Reagan made last November to crack down on Soviet espionage in the U.S. and "let the chips fall where they may." Shultz argued for a less dramatic response both to protect U.S. diplomatic functions in Moscow and to prevent staffing controversies from sabotaging arms-control prospects.

Meese won the argument. On Tuesday the U.S. ordered 55 named diplomats expelled from the embassy and consulate by Nov. 1. From now on, the State Department announced, it will enforce a ceiling: 225 people with diplomatic accreditation allowed in each embassy and 26 in each consulate. At a later briefing, three National Security Council officials said all the alleged diplomats getting the gate are "connected to Soviet intelligence," many in the roles of spymasters for the KGB or GRU (military intelligence). Crowed one counterespionage specialist: "As of Nov. 1, there will be no leadership or management left in Soviet intelligence here." The Soviet spy network, he said, has "basically been decapitated."

Moscow's reply was delivered by none other than Mikhail Gorbachev. Appearing on Soviet television Wednesday to give his second report on the Reykjavík summit and its aftermath, the Kremlin leader denounced the 55 expulsions as "actions which appear simply wild to a normal human view." He added, "We will take measures in response, of course. They are very tough and balance things out, so to speak."

In fact, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov had already announced an ingenious counterescalation. It started with the expulsion of yet another five American diplomats (who may have had intelligence connections, U.S. officials indicate). Then came the surprise: all 260 Soviet citizens sent by a branch of the Foreign Ministry to work at the embassy or consulate as cooks, drivers, typists and the like would be pulled off the job. For good measure, another 30 to 40 third-country employees, ranging from Filipino clerks to Swedish nannies, may have to be sent home.

Thus, said Gerasimov slyly, the Soviet Union had established the "full quantitative balance" in diplomatic personnel that the U.S. demanded. After all, service jobs in the Soviet embassy and consulate in the U.S. are performed, at Moscow's choice, by Soviet citizens sent overseas with diplomatic accreditation. Many perform double duties as diplomats and service workers. If the Americans now want beds made in the Moscow embassy and snow shoveled outside, they must do the same. Of course, under the ceilings proclaimed by the U.S., every American servant sent to Moscow or Leningrad with diplomatic credentials will have to replace a real diplomat.

"We are hoist with our own petard," grumbled a State Department official. But NSC briefers contend the move was actually a plus for embassy security. Soviet employees have long been suspected of snooping on the American diplomats they serve. In any case, U.S. officials made plain there would be no further retalia-

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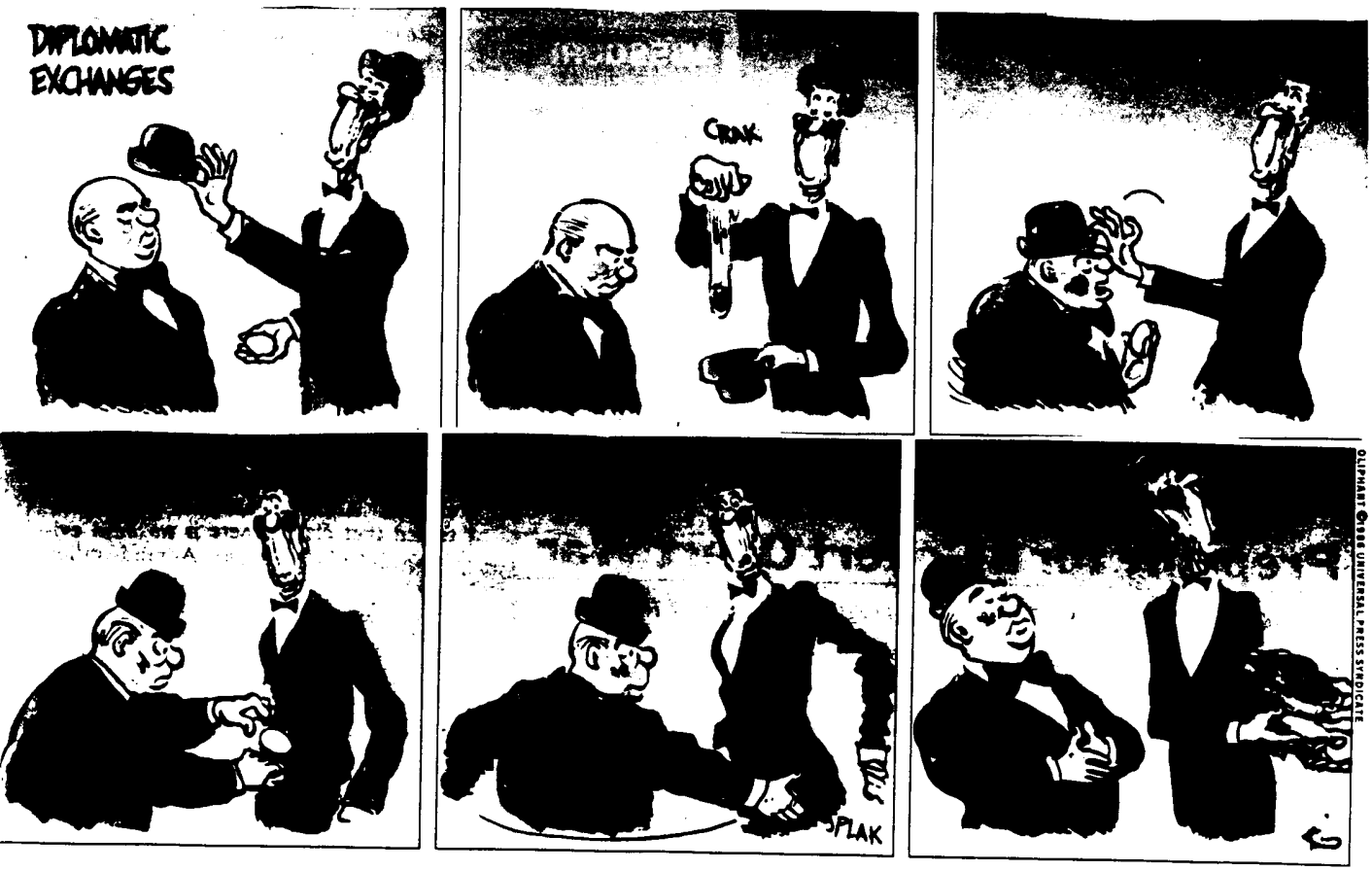


tion. Said State Department Spokesman Charles Redman: "We need now to get on with the resolution of the larger issues affecting U.S.-Soviet relations."

Gorbachev took care not to torpedo the largest of those issues, arms reduction, at the end of what was otherwise an almost contemptuous TV speech. Among other things, the Soviet leader assailed the Reagan Administration for spreading "half-truths" about the deal that had almost been reached at the Iceland summit and attacked Reagan for being unable to control an "entourage which literally breathes hatred for the Soviet Union." But Gorbachev wound up by saying that all his proposals made at the Iceland summit for drastic cuts in nuclear arms "still stand."

The White House chose to ignore Gorbachev's barbs and focus on the pledge of continued arms negotiations. "The speech was long on rhetoric, short on policy, which was probably positive," said a senior U.S. official. Reagan even called the speech "heartening." That is quite a stretch: Gorbachev still insisted that all arms reductions are contingent on restrictions on the Strategic Defense Initiative that Reagan will not accept. Said Gorbachev: "No package, no concessions."

On the U.S. side, the current push is to "translate" the sweeping generalities of the Iceland summit into detailed proposals to be presented by American negotiators at arms-control talks in Geneva. The job is proving to be slow going. Reagan and Gorbachev cannot even agree on what they almost agreed on in Reykjavik: Gorbachev contends that Reagan accepted the elimination of all nuclear weapons in ten years. Indeed, verbatim notes from the meeting show the President replied, "Suits me fine." The White House, however, insists he was talking about an "ultimate goal" and formally proposed only to get rid of all ballistic missiles. In either case, both the American military and U.S. allies have qualms about how they could then counter the substantial Soviet superiority in conventional arms. But detailed negotiating instructions must be drafted before Shultz meets Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in Vienna next week. With the expulsion war apparently in a stalemate, the two statesmen may be able to talk about missiles, warheads and bombs rather than diplomats, spies and maids. —*By George J. Church. Reported by James O. Jackson/Moscow and Johanna McGeary/Washington*